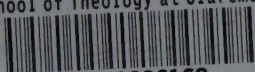


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THE SECRET OF
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THE
Secret of Power
FOR
Daily Living

By Rev. Wm. Houghton

"My grace is sufficient for thee."—2 Cor. xii. 9

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THE SECRET OF POWER FOR DAILY LIVING

Cap I

THE SECRET OF POWER FOR DAILY LIVING

I AM wanting, in the pages that follow, to treat not upon the theoretical, but upon the practical side of that blessed life into which we are called and brought by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul in one place evidently contrasts the life he was living at the time of his writing with the life he used to live, and that not merely before his conversion, but before passing through a great spiritual crisis, which probably happened some time after his conversion, for he says, "The life that I *now* live, I live in faith, the faith which

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is in the Son of God" (Gal. ii. 20, R.V.) It was then a changed life, as unlike the former life as the promised land was unlike the wilderness; a life of faith as opposed to a life of sight, and of frames and feelings; a life ruled and controlled by Christ, instead of being a life of self-culture and self-discipline; a life which no longer had self for its pivot, but which was God-centred; a life not of defeat and failure, but one of victory, and of victory as the normal experience—a restful life; for had not all the old strain gone out of it, since the fact was grasped that it was not the servant who had the charges of the work upon him, but a gracious and generous Master, who was just wanting to do His work through His servant? a satisfied life, even as the Lord Himself indicated when talking to the woman of Samaria, He spake the memorable words, "Whoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him

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a well of water springing up into eternal life" (St. John iv. 14). And it was also an overflowing life—a life rich in blessing to others, as every Spirit-filled life must be, for out of such an one "flow rivers of living water" (St. John vii. 38), and the flow of such rivers must turn many an arid waste into a fruitful field.

But there are some who listen to or read expositions of the blessed life, and feel in doing so, it is all very beautiful in theory, and then when their thoughts turn to their many past failures, to their conscious weakness and infirmities, to the trying circumstances of their lot, their hearts sink within them for fear that such a life, however possible for others, is not possible for them. It is therefore important at the beginning that we should endeavour to convince one another that the blessed life is a possibility for all that are in Christ, and who are redeemed by His precious blood.

Let it then be clearly understood that

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the teachings of the Divine Lord and His apostles in the New Testament are given with a view to our *present* daily life in the world. It is perfectly true that we are never allowed to forget that this is not our rest, that behind the seen is the unseen, that "we have a city," and the murmurs of the waves, as they break upon the eternal shore, are perpetually falling upon our ears. And yet it is remarkable, turn almost to what page you will of your New Testament, how much is clearly spoken with a view to our common everyday life in the world that is. God's commandments and promises do not refer to our life in some happier world than this; and in giving us the comfort and counsel that He has given us, it is evident that our loving Master contemplates our having to walk along the same rough and toilsome paths as those in which He walked.

We are the followers of the Lord Jesus, and to be a true follower means that we

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live His life. There is such a thing as taking on us Christ's name and living our own life. When the tree is grafted, the gardener takes care that all the forces of the original stock shall only do one thing, and that is to contribute nourishment to the new element of life introduced to it. It is no longer to live its own life. But sometimes, through neglect, the brier stock is allowed to put forth its own shoots, and so it lives its own life. So many, though having some relation to Christ, and bearing His name, are not living His life. They believe poetry, but they live prose. They call Jesus "Lord," but "live unto themselves." They keep not a few of the idols, which they were commanded to put away, standing in the temple of their heart. They display in temper, and walk, and speech much that is contrary to the grace and sweetness of Him who was meek and lowly in heart, and all that must indeed be grievous to the heart of our Divine Redeemer, es-

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pecially in view of the fact that He has made ample provision for such an altered state of things. Living thus, what is it but to put the crown of thorns again upon His head, and to drive the cruel nails afresh into His blessed hands and feet?

But to live the life of the Lord Jesus is not a mere outward or mechanical copying of His example. It does not mean our using Him as an artist uses some beautiful or perfect model. Many gaze, it would seem, upon His portraiture, as it is given in the four Gospels, till they become fascinated with the sight, and ambitious to reproduce it in themselves. But it is by no process of mere imitation that we can ever hope to live the Christ-life. We can only live that life as we ourselves pass out of view and Christ comes to live in us, and to be indeed the Master of the house. We have heard St. Paul speak of his changed life, but he had only entered that new life through being crucified and buried with Christ.

FOR DAILY LIVING

Listen again to what He says: "I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live, and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii. 20). How had Paul been crucified with Christ. When did that event transpire? Ah! so close is the union between the Christian believer and his Saviour that all that Saviour ever did, as such, was done for His redeemed ones; and they are regarded as having done in Him that which He has done for them, and all who believe in Him and follow Him died, were crucified, when Christ was crucified: and we have to take up that position by faith as those that have been crucified, and daily and hourly "reckon ourselves dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. vi. 11).

And in Christ all things are ours. The discovery of this fact has been to many like the dawn of a new day in their religious life. They lived for years, poor enough in themselves, and as they thought, the followers of a poor Master. They

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are still as conscious as ever that they are poor in themselves, but they have found out they are rich in Christ. They knew before that they had peace, pardon, and eternal life in Christ, but they did not know before that in Him we had *all*. What a wondrous "all" it is! "All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. ii. 3). And the discovery of this has set their life to a new key. It has changed it from an experience all too like the fickle brightness of an April day to the calm and settled splendour of a day in August. There are many still for whom this discovery is waiting. They are as men that toil hard for a living, and who, unknown to themselves, have in their possession documents that entitle them to great wealth. All the promises of God are for His children, and why should not we all put in our claim for that which in those promises is made over to us—for the Holy Ghost as well as for pardon and comfort? If a blessing is promised, is not that a

warrant for claiming it, and so of "possessing our possessions"? (Obad. 17).

But have we the right to claim? To whom is the offer of pardon made if not to the sinful, and if, therefore, one can establish the fact that he is sinful, he has so far established his right to claim the pardon promised in the gospel? To whom is addressed the promise of rest? Is it not to them that labour and are heavy laden? If then we labour and are heavy laden, that promise is made to us, and we have the right to claim the rest that is promised to them that come to the Saviour. To whom is the promise of the Holy Ghost addressed? "The promise is unto you, and to your children, and to them that are afar off, and to as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts ii. 39); and if, therefore, we are sure that we have a place in that wide and far-reaching circle, we have established our right to claim our personal share in the Holy Spirit, and when He comes into the heart He makes

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good to us all that a loving Father has stored in Jesus for His children.

And what happens when we fail to claim our inheritance in Christ is seen in the life of fluctuating experience which many Christians live. It is a sigh rather than a song ; a series of melancholy failures rather than a daily triumph ; a course of declension and stumbling rather than a bright, calm, happy walk with God. What is amiss? What aileth thee, O soul? Be it what it may, it is a case for the Master to deal with rather than for His servants. Take it to Him. "A bruised reed shall He not break, and smoking flax shall He not quench" (St. Matt. xii. 20). Think of that reed, growing by the river's brink, injured or trampled down by the foot of some great beast going down to drink. There are many marred and bruised lives, many that have been bruised by sorrow and disappointment, and the Lord Jesus has a special mission for all bruised and broken reeds.

FOR DAILY LIVING

Or is the reed a little instrument of music upon which the shepherd in his loneliness has been wont to play his simple native airs, and wake, as he kept his flock, the echoes of hill and valley, but which, broken now, is no longer tuneful? Poor little broken lute, what is to be done for thee?

Is not that injured lute a picture of many hearts? They are out of tune. When you are with really earnest and joyous Christians, you feel somehow out of harmony with them, and are made half angry at their very brightness and whole-heartedness. When you are in church on Sundays, and you hear the sweetness and the love of Jesus dwelt upon, you feel out of sympathy; and when you kneel down to pray, alas! it is not prayer, and you feel out of tune with God, and out of tune with heaven. Poor little broken lute, what shall be done for it? Who can make it musical and tuneful again?

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Give it Me, says the Lord Jesus ; give it Me. Put it into My hand. No one else can do anything for the bruised reed ; and He is so kind, so patient, so wise, so persevering, that He never fails. This is work for His hand. Let Him undertake for you, and He will make your life musical and tuneful, and your lips shall show forth His praise ; and through whatever humbling and painful processes we may have to pass in being restored to a right condition, it will be found always safe to trust ourselves to Him, and to hourly consent to His doing in us all that may be needful to make us what He wishes us to be.



Cap 2

FACE TO FACE WITH THE FOE

THERE is something that is almost startling in the sequence of events as we have them described in the early chapters of the Gospel according to St. Matthew. First comes the record of the baptism of Jesus by John in the river Jordan; next comes the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Jesus in the form of a dove; and next the Voice from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," and it almost alarms one to read what follows: "Then was Jesus led up (St. Mark has 'driven') of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (St. Matt. iv. 1). What an abrupt, what a strange transition !

FACE TO FACE

Yet it was an experience which has its counterpart in many lives. God tests in one way or another those whom He honours, or is about greatly to use ; and it is no uncommon thing for the Lord's people to find times of great blessing followed by times of sore temptation. Is it not so? Have not you sometimes spent a Sabbath which has been like one of the days of heaven upon earth, and felt the forces of temptation to be stronger than ever on the Monday which immediately succeeds? Have you not had, early in the morning, more than once, a quiet and blessed time with God, like a moment on the Mount, and proved that Satan had seldom been more busy with you than he was in the hours that followed?

And perhaps, this being so, you have sometimes been half persuaded to fear that you are not a child of God at all. But there may be no more reason for your doubting your sonship because you are the subject of temptation than there was

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for the Lord Jesus doubting His Sonship under similar circumstances. Do not question the fact of your membership in the Family, or the reality of your baptism of the Holy Ghost, simply because that baptism is succeeded by fierce temptation. Do not say you must have been mistaken when you thought the Holy Ghost fell on you simply because you are exposed to these trials of faith, these trials of patience, these trials of love. Read over and over again the life of your blessed Lord and Master, and find from that life that circumstances may change, that the light of the sun may be withdrawn and give place to the darkness of a starless sky ; that instead of the sound of the shepherd's pipe in the valley, there may be the noise of war, without affecting our relations to God. We remain His children, and He remains our Father, and our portion is "in Him." Sonship does not depend upon moods and feelings. I may be a child of God and yet tempted of the devil.

FACE TO FACE

God does not change. Jesus Christ was just as much the beloved Son of God in those awful hours when the devil brought his full force against Him to compass, if possible, His fall, as He was in that glorious hour when the Spirit came upon Him like a dove, and when, out of the opened heavens, the Father declared Himself well pleased in Him.

For temptation is not necessarily a sin. It is no more a sin to be tempted of the devil than if one walking home were met by another, who bids him go with him and break one of the Ten Commandments ; or than if a thief were to knock at the house of which a servant is left in charge, and ask to be let in to rifle the treasures that house contains. No one can prevent the thief from coming ; the sin, therefore, is not in the temptation, but in the yielding.

Perhaps indeed, instead of tormenting ourselves over the fact that we are tempted, we might find even a little com-

WITH THE FOE

fort in it. There are houses into which no thief would ever think of breaking, for there is nothing to steal. It is not in the winter time, when the vines are all bare, that the owners of the vineyard feel it needful to set a watch; but when the golden autumn comes, and the ripe clusters hang from every bough; then he must set his watch, for the ripened grapes attract the pilferer. And so it is in the realm of spiritual things: the richer the treasure we hold, the more will our great adversary seek to rob us of it. It is quite safe, therefore, to dismiss the idea that temptation is necessarily a sin.

But while it is quite safe to do that, the true followers of the Lord Jesus will be very careful to avoid occasions and causes of temptation. Is it not possible to invite, to tempt, Satan to come to us? Was not Lot doing that when, letting purely worldly considerations influence his choice, he "pitched his tent towards Sodom"? Were not the disciples doing that when

they began disputing among themselves as to which should be greatest? Was not Judas doing that, when he began forsaking the company of his brethren, and began seeking the company of the chief priests and Pharisees? Are we blameless if we, knowing that certain resorts, certain books, certain pictures, certain companionships, expose us in a peculiar way to the assault of the foe, wilfully turn to them? Temptation, therefore, may be a sin (St. James i. 13-15). When the heart is impure or selfish, or when it is soiled by unholy loves, or when it is covetous, or vain, or proud, it will be often tempted of itself. Oh, what need have we of a heart, made clean by the power of the Holy Spirit if we are to escape the corruption that is in the world through lust!

For there is nothing that gives the adversary such advantage in his assaults upon us as a bias to unholy things. If an army besieges a city, and that city has one traitor in it, the besieging army will

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stand a better chance of getting in than would be otherwise possible. And there are many hearts like that city. They have a traitor on the inside, lurking in some hidden place, upon whom Satan will easily work. Perhaps it is pride, or anger, or worldly ambition, or an inordinate love of human praise, or some unregulated passion, or some unbroken idol, or some unsundered sinful desire ; but whatever it is, so long as it remains, it is the ally upon which the great enemy of souls relies, and by means of which the city may be captured. Is it safe to keep it there ? Is it not better, a thousand times, to drag that traitor out, and to take it before the judgment seat of Christ, that it may be delivered over to condemnation and to death ?

Now, of course, in the Lord Jesus, Satan found nothing of his own ; and yet it was a real temptation ; it was no make-believe battle. For does not the apostle tell us that " He suffered, being tempted " (Heb. ii. 18). And we may be certain that it

was all in some way necessary for His perfect equipment for the great work which He came from heaven to do, and which, from the place of enthronement, He still carries on, and we who follow in His steps, and are tempted as He was tempted in the wilderness, may well take comfort, even in the midst of fiery trials, as we remember that we are the disciples and friends of Him who was in all points tempted like as we are, and who, being tempted and having overcome, is able to succour them that are tempted.

In our Lord's temptation Satan took advantage of the physical exhaustion brought about by His long fast. He did not come to the Lord Jesus at the beginning, but at the end of those forty days. He came to Him, not in the moment of His strength, but in the moment of His weakness. It had been so, long before, in the case of Elijah; it has been so, often and often since, in the experience of many of the servants of the Lord. Satan is a

WITH THE FOE

cruel foe, and in the hour of physical weakness, or when loss, or sorrow, or bereavement, has come upon us with its dark shadow, he is sure to be especially busy with us. Then is the time when to "watch and pray" is a supreme necessity.

And as with the Lord Himself, so often with His servants, the adversary begins by seeking to suggest doubts as to our personal relations to God. "If Thou be the Son of God!" For a moment allow yourself, when face to face with the foe, to call in question your sonship, and for you the battle is half lost. There is no ground on which it is so safe to stand and from which it is so possible to withstand as this—"I am God's child, redeemed with the precious blood of Jesus, sealed with His Spirit, and He who has done so much for me already will not now withdraw His hand, and nothing shall separate me from the love of God." "This is the victory that overcometh, even your *faith* (1 St. John v. 4). Let nothing dislodge

you from the position of faith. Have you not marked how in the Epistle of St. John that position is constantly taken? Recall how often the phrase "we know" meets your eye. And, after all, our relation to God is not a question of feeling or sensation. It is a question of fact. "Beloved, now *are we* the children of God" (1 John iii. 2). There is no position like that for successfully dealing with the foe.

But we may only confidently expect the Lord to put forth His delivering power in our behalf, when we walk in His ways. The Saviour was led of *the Spirit* into the wilderness. When we are living in fellowship with God and walking in the light, the Holy Ghost is sure to prompt us as to the particular service the King asks of us. And we must go where He leads, even though that path to human eye looks thick with dangers. The temptations which we meet in paths which we have chosen for ourselves are one, and those we meet with in the pathway of the Divine will

are another. If God calls us into a den of lions, we may expect that He will shut their mouths, and deprive them of their power to do us harm. If He calls us to pass through the fire, we may expect that He will take from that fire everything but that which makes it the executor of His purpose. If He calls us to cross a desert, we may expect that He will make a way for us there, and create for us springs of water. Once sure of the call, there is only one thing to do, and that is, go forward, and in the way of God's will we may expect His gracious protection and care. At the battle of Waterloo, it is said that a rich Brussels merchant, moved by curiosity, found his way to the Duke of Wellington's headquarters, and asked him if he were not afraid for his life with all the shot and shell flying around him. "*You,*" was the reply,—"*you may well be afraid, for you have no business here, but I am doing my duty.*" It is a serious question for some Christians in some

places, "Have you any business here?" Christians who go to places of worldly pleasure and amusement out of curiosity, and to be "able to judge of things for themselves," or who take up books written by enemies of the faith in order to throw doubt and discredit upon what is most sacred, that "they may know what is being talked about in literary circles," are walking in slippery places; they are like children playing with edged tools. In every path into which God leads us by His Spirit we may, however many the perils, look for the putting forth of His power to keep us. But in the path of self-will men fall an easy prey to their foe.

It is at least an also instructive lesson to note how our Lord, each time the attack upon Him was made, repelled it by an appeal to the written Word. "It is written!" Yes, He knew the strength and value of that bejewelled sword of the Spirit. Oh, that we may know it too! There are some who would fain persuade

WITH THE FOE

their fellows that that sword, like our ancestors' weapons of war, is now old and rusty, and out of date, and no longer fit for the modes of modern warfare. But who among the servants want to be wiser than their Master? Who wants a better weapon than the one He used, and of which it is still true to say, as David said of the sword of Goliath, "There is none like that." And it will be of immense service to all of us, as the foe daily assails us in one way or another, to know what God has said, to have it laid up in our hearts ready for use, to have our spirits immersed in the teachings of Scripture, and to be able to meet the devil's lie with the spoken and written word of God.

But let the fact never be overlooked that our fight with Satan is "a fight of *faith*" (1 Tim. vi. 12). We are no match in ourselves for him. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain" (Ps. cxxvii. 1). It is not for us to go out to fight the foe. It is the rather for

FACE TO FACE WITH THE FOE

us to retreat into our Fortress ; to take up the right attitude towards the Lord Jesus ; to put the battle into His hands, to let Him deal with our adversary ; and as we stand in right relation to Him, no weapon that is formed against us shall prosper. A dying lad met the assaults of the tempter by simply saying, "Yes, Satan, I know I am a poor weak boy ; but I am in Christ, and before you can overcome me you must overcome *Him*." Was not that both a fight and a victory of faith ? And in the hour of temptation our true safety is to put the Lord Himself between us and all that came up against us. He is our Shield (Gen. xv. 1), and if we are on the right side of the shield, the darts hurled at us cannot reach us. They strike upon the shield and fall harmless to the ground. How blessed to be thus placed, with the Lord between us and the foe !



Cap 3

SELF-CONTROL OR CHRIST-CONTROL

IT is impossible to be much with our fellows and not see that there are many who want to be better than they are, and who are making toilsome efforts to bring themselves under something like control, and to hold in check the forces of their nature, and all such efforts on the part of those who make them, at least reveal a desire, and sometimes a very earnest desire, to attain by self-discipline to something not yet attained ; and even among Christian teachers there are not wanting those who seem to regard self-culture and self-control as the pathway which conducts to holiness.

But how far is self-control possible, and to what extent is it urged upon us in

Scripture? It is plain that some have lost it altogether, and are no more capable of controlling themselves, their appetites, passions, or feelings, than is a straw able to control itself in the swirl of the torrent, or a feather in the fury of the wind, and they have become simply the sport of their circumstances. And there are many others who, if not in such a sorry plight as that, are nevertheless continually finding out what a really little they are able to do in this matter of controlling themselves, and, in spite of the best intentions, the rule of self over self is at any moment liable to break down. How often have we in a moment of weakness suffered some sin to have dominion over us,—given way, when provoked, to anger or to fretfulness and pride, and in the shame and penitence which have come to us afterwards have said in our hearts that such things should never happen again, only to find out, perhaps, after an interval of a few days or even a few hours, that

CHRIST-CONTROL

our supposed power to rule ourselves is a dream and not a fact.

Every man comes into life with what in theological language is called "inbred sin," derived from his relationship with Adam. There are tendencies, principles of evil, in us which are inbred, and which in our natural state are apt to break out like the breaking loose of pent-up waters, or the bursting forth of subterranean fires. All are more or less conscious of this, and the question is, Have we power to keep these tendencies and principles and forces in us under control? It is indeed possible to do so by moral determination sometimes, for a season more or less prolonged; but it is the sorrowful testimony of experience that we can do no more than drug these evil forces in us to sleep, and that at any moment, given certain circumstances and temptations, they may shake their slumber off them, and arise in all the awfulness of their strength.

Has the Lord Jesus made no provision for dealing with these forces of evil in us? He does not indeed exterminate or eradicate them. Our sinful flesh never becomes anything else than sinful flesh, which must be mortified daily. He undertakes what is more difficult than eradication. It would be more easy to kill a wild beast than to tame it and bring it into subjection. And what the Lord proposes to do in us, and for us, is not to take any power away from us, not to destroy any faculty, but to take this evil principle that is in us, and to so act upon it, through our faith in Him, as to make it of none effect, and to withdraw all the faculties by which hitherto we have served sin, and to make them henceforth the instruments by which we serve Him. And how? By Himself coming in the power of the Spirit to occupy our hearts. That is the Divine plan for dealing with inbred sin. It is the abiding in us, as of the Master in His house, that alone can cast out

CHRIST-CONTROL

Satan, and furnish a mighty counteractive force to the presence and power of evil.

And to those that have long striven to gain the mastery over some evil besetment, the knowledge that there is One both able and willing to do for them what they have found out they are totally unable to do for themselves has come to them like the vision of an approaching army of relief has come to those ready to perish in a besieged city, and it has marked the beginning of a new and happier life for them to discover ; that the battle is the Lord's and not theirs, and that they have not to spend their strength and resources in a vain attempt to be their own masters, but have calmly and deliberately to consent to such an abiding of the Lord Himself as King and Ruler in the heart as shall mean the entire handing over of the management of everything to Him, and He thereupon takes upon Himself the task of dealing with such of His enemies and ours as He may find remaining in us.

SELF-CONTROL OR

There are many whose temper and natural irritability, aggravated as it is in many cases by over-work or by delicate health, give them a great deal of trouble and sorrow. They are often ready to despair and to fear that things will never be different with them, and the best thing they seem able to hope is that as the years wear on somehow this evil force within them, and which they have never been able to control, will exhaust itself, wear itself out. Evil principles, however, do not tend to wear themselves out, but the rather to increase in strength. What is to be done? Will you try what will come of putting yourself under more stringent rules of self-discipline and self-denial? But has not all the result of self-effort in the past been that though the torrent has been stemmed a little, it has broken forth from its banks again? Is there any help short of the power of the risen Jesus available and effectual? King Saul was soothed and quieted by the music which

CHRIST-CONTROL

David brought from his harp as his fingers swept over the strings ; but there came a day when even that artifice failed, and like all human expedients, it was at most a palliative, a salving of the wound, a temporary relief, and no real cure. The evil spirit that troubled Saul was not cast out ; it was only put to sleep. And every means short of the Lord Himself must fail ; and should not the lesson of all our past failures lead us to cease from ourselves, to abandon all attempts at self-control, and to throw ourselves upon Him who has been leading us through failure, that, finding out our own utter helplessness, we may the more thankfully and gladly welcome Him in His all-conquering might and all-sufficient grace ? He is able ; and seeing He has done so much in procuring for us the remission of sins, is it too much to expect of Him who has saved our soul from death that He should keep our feet from falling ? If to create a world were not beyond His power, can it be a thing

too hard for Him to come and put His foot upon the neck of His foes, and subdue them under Him? Is not that what He wants to do? But too long have we kept Him on the outside of the door, while with our own hand we have been trying to reduce chaos to order and to make the house clean and beautiful, and fit for a habitation of God. There is a more sure way of doing it than that. It is to open the door and let the Saviour in. He will cleanse the house. He will take the old sins which we have tried in vain to master and bind them in strong chains. He will be our purity, our peace, our patience, our gentleness. Victory is always where Jesus is. And the one condition of His coming is that He be allowed to come as Master, that all things—the key of every chamber and secret drawer—is put without reserve into His hand, and that we stand aside and let Him have His own way, and live His own life in us and through us.

CHRIST-CONTROL

And then as the power of conquest is not ours, so neither will be the glory of it. Proud self will never be able to lift up its head from the dust, to sing its own praises, and to say "Mine own arm hath gotten me the victory." All boasting is taken away from us by the remembrance that it was not our might, but His, which subdued our enemies under our feet. God will have it so that if any glory, they shall glory in the Lord. And thus throughout all eternity our song will be not the song of those who have passed to victory through struggle, and self discipline, and self culture, but the song of those who have found liberty from bondage, through faith, and deliverance from the world, and self, and sin, through union with a risen and living Saviour in which by faith we stand: "Unto Him who loved us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood, to Him be the glory and the dominion for ever and ever." (Rev. i. 5, 6, R.V.)



Cap 4

THE CHRISTIAN IN THE WORLD

ONE of the questions that will arise in the heart sometimes is as to how far it is possible to live a holy life in a sinful world? The Apostle Paul, in a well-known passage, after speaking of the world of his day as a crooked and perverse nation, affirms of the Philippian Christians that in the midst of it they were "shining as lights in the world" (Phil. ii. 15). How far is that true of the Christians of our time? Are we giving tone to the world, or is the world giving tone to us? Is the spirit of the world affecting our life and thought, or are we affecting by our spirit the life and thought of the world? It is impossible to hide the fact that there are a great

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many worldly Christians in the Church, whose worldliness shows itself in their conversation, their pleasures, and recreations, their conformity to the fashions of the world, their companionships, in their objections to a really faithful and spiritual ministry, in their contentment with mere outward forms and ceremonies, their utter lack of interest and zeal in Christian service, in a general spirit of prayerlessness, and in the absence of anything that distinguishes them as being separate from the world. Such Christians are not shining as lights in the world, for a beam of light receives no admixture from the things on which it falls, and remains separate whether it shines on things foul or fair. And here is the problem, How can I, a follower of the Lord Jesus, be among men as a beam of light which gives much to the surroundings to which it has come, but which borrows nothing from them? It is indeed the happy lot of some to live in quiet sheltered positions in life,

where the sights and sounds of this world's evil, as far as possible, are shut away from them. But there are others who have to be much in the world, and have hourly to mix with those that do not seem to have a single spiritual interest, and the horizon of whose life is bounded by "things seen and temporal." And how can they breathe the poison-laden air and yet escape contagion?—be often in the midst of the soul-deadening influences, and yet suffer no ill?

Our heavenly Master, from the first, contemplated His disciples as intended to be in the world, for in His great intercessory prayer He prayed His Father not to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil. He Himself was no recluse. He never sought to live apart from men. He moved among them freely, mingled with them in their scenes of joy and sorrow, and no one could, even from His example, suppose that in order to live a holy life it was essential

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to withdraw from the world and seek the cloistered cell. For He, though freely mixing thus with men, was always like a beam of heavenly light amongst them. The sordid aims, the anxious, fretful cares, the small ambitions, the pride and selfishness, which seemed to rest like a blight upon so many around Him, and the envyings and jealousies which robbed so many of all peace in life, had no place in Him. His whole being was ever open to heaven like a flower which looks up to the sun. His mind was calm and still, and in its calmness shone the reflection of the pure world above. His whole nature was love; no human greed or passion ever agitated Him. He was in the world, and yet how separate from it! And what He was it was almost His last prayer that His disciples should be also.

High ends, of course, are meant to be served by the presence of His followers in the world. The Saviour might have arranged it so that at the moment of their

conversion His friends should be translated to some happier sphere far removed from the distraction of earthly care, the peril of temptation, the beating of life's rude storms. But He has His servants' good to think of. He has the needs of the world to think of. He has the glory of the Father to think of. And it is a far grander triumph of His grace and power to leave His disciples in the world, exposed to all the assaults of the powers of darkness, and to keep them from the evil, than it would be to at once remove them to a clime where no trial could reach them. And so He leaves the merchant in his office, and the clerk at his desk, and the fisherman in his boat, and the busy mother in the midst of all her domestic cares. He does not say, in order to live the life you are called to live you must come apart from these things, but He bids each one take the little sphere in which He, the Master, finds them, and regard that as a sphere in which

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to serve Him, and to work out all that which He works in them, bidding them only day by day keep the right attitude towards Him, He undertaking, as they do so, to be their guide and refuge.

And as a means of help towards unworldliness of life and spirit, let us seek to understand more both the meaning and purpose of our redemption. Was it not at least one part of the Saviour's work for us to deliver us from the present evil world, to call us out into a life of fellowship with Himself, to bring us away from under the influence of things seen and temporal by revealing to us things unseen and eternal? Is not that vision of eternal things one which, in the Christian mind, dwarfs all that is of the world? And if any ask him how it is that he does not suffer himself to be taken up, as many are taken up, with the passing shadows of time, and how it is that the things which attract so many have no attraction for him, he can only reply :

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“I see a hand you cannot see ;
It beckons me away :
I hear a voice you cannot hear ;
It says I must not stay.”

There are mysterious powers of attraction acting upon his heart which he may not be able to explain, but the force of which he feels. We as Christians have been redeemed that we might become a people for God's own possession.

But that we have been redeemed out of the world does not lessen our obligation to do all we can for those whom we meet in passing through the world. The thought that “we are not of the world” will not lessen the zest with which we seek to bless the sad, the lonely, the suffering, and the sorrowing, who are all around us, as Jesus did ; it will not make us the less earnest in pressing home the claims of Christ and gathering the lost around the cross. It will not diminish our love one of another, or our sympathy for each other, in dark and troubled days.

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The less worldly we are, and the more we are with Christ in holy separation, the greater will be our capacity for real usefulness. Jesus "went about doing good," and the disciple who would be as his Master in the world will not only pray to be kept unspotted from the world, but will also pray that he may be kept from all selfish indifference to the needs of others, and that, blessed himself, he may also be a blessing to others. And it will be so if we are fully yielded to the Lord Jesus, and if He is allowed fully to possess us. He would have His disciple act upon society as salt and as light. It is marvellous how, the moment some enter a room, or join a circle of friends, the tone goes up. It is like a breath of fresh air from the hills. This does not arise so much from anything they say, as from the fact that they are themselves filled with the consciousness of God, and they seem to awaken something of the same consciousness in others. Just as Isaac, blind and

feeble though he was, knew his son Esau because the "smell of the fields" was upon his raiment, so there are some that seem in a wonderful way to be accompanied by God, and their influence upon society is the influence of a God-possessed and a God-controlled man. Yes, He must be very real to us, and our relations very close and intimate with Him, if wherever we go it is to seem to our fellows as if we brought our Master with us. Of one who lived and did his work for God long ago, it was said that he "endured as seeing Him who is invisible" (Heb. xi. 27). Is not this the faith that overcomes the world, that keeps it under our feet,—the faith that sees God under every circumstance? It is the consciousness of God, and such a consciousness of God is like the spring of water in the garden, which keeps it green and beautiful when all around it is a desert waste; but such a God-consciousness can never be the fruit of careless and hurried habits of devo-

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tion. It is rather the result of patient, reverent, and unhurried waiting upon Him, of a daily yielding to His will in all things, and of doing all we do to Him, and not to men. It is in fellowship with Him that the warrior gets put on him the armour for the conflict, that the servant learns his Lord's will for him during the day, and that the soul becomes wrapt around as with a spiritual atmosphere, which is like a wall of invisible fire, and which makes it safe for us to go and meet the seductive influences of the world. And it is only safe to go into the world when we have first of all gone and opened up our whole being to the presence of God in the power of the Holy Ghost, and then filled with Him, clothed with Him, protected by Him, we shall be in the world like the three brave youths in the midst of flames which had lost their power to burn or do them harm, and from which they came forth, not only unbound, but without even the smell of fire upon their garments (Dan. iii. 47).



Cap 5

THOSE OF OUR OWN HOUSEHOLD

Phil 2

THERE is perhaps no place where the power of the Lord Jesus to keep and to deliver is more frequently and more severely tested, than when we are among those of our own household. It may be that a tone prevails there which, if not distinctly opposed to it, gives little aid to the spiritual life, and the thought sometimes will come that, however possible it may be to live the life of faith in some atmospheres, it is not possible to live it in every atmosphere, and of all places home is the place where, according to the confession of many, they are most often failing and breaking down.

How is it? Is it that we are less watch-

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ful over our actions there than elsewhere? It is very possible to be careful of our speech, and of our walk, in the world outside, and a little less careful of it at home; and there are some who seem to keep the greater part of their courtesies and smiles for those without, and to have few left for their own households, and the credit they get for graciousness and affability sometimes, is hardly supported by what they are seen to be in their own homes. And it ought not so to be; and if such men are professedly Christians, their irritability, their selfishness, their censoriousness, and their lack of sympathy are sure to be a hindrance to the advancement of the kingdom of Christ. The life of a true follower of the Lord Jesus will have in it none of these contradictions. It will be fashioned after that pattern of the perfect life given us in Him. That life was one beautiful harmony, each part fitting into the other and agreeing with all the rest, like the

various pieces of marble in mosaic work, or like the different instruments in an orchestra, all up to concert pitch and all in tune one with the other. If the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ can only effect this in us under certain circumstances, and not in others, it is of comparatively small value to us. But can it be so? Must He not be as well able to shine in us and through us in one set of conditions as another?

Think now a little of home life and of our place in the midst of it. Perhaps one of the first temptations that meets us there is that we may be forgiven if we think less of the feelings of those who belong to our own households than of those that stand without, and so things are often said and done at home that would never be said or done outside it. It is as if many said within themselves, "It does not matter what I do there. I can, at least in my own home, do as I please. If I don't care to take the trouble to be ami-

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able, there is no need why I should ; if I am irritable, I need not mind showing it there ; if I see what does not please me, I need not mind letting it be shown that I am displeased." And so it happens sometimes, that Christians shine with a feebler and dimmer light for Christ at home than away. But if we are not led by the grace that has come to us to be as thoughtful for those who belong to our own households, whether husband or wife, parent or child, mistress or maid, as for the stranger, the friend, or the occasional guest, there is something lacking in our faith, and we are living the self-life and not the Christ-life.

Then again, how strong is the temptation in relation to our home-life to worry, and to worry about almost everything. Perhaps there are few sins to which Christians are more prone than that of worry. For worry *is* a sin, and not a mere constitutional infirmity. What is sin? Is it not a transgression of the law? Now,

has not our heavenly Father over and over again charged us (Ps. xxxvii. 1, 7, 8; St. Matt. vi. 25; Phil. iv. 6; 1 Pet. v. 7) not to fret, to cast all our care on Him, to be anxious for nothing, and when we worry, no matter what the subject of our worrying may be, we are doing not only what is useless, but we are doing what God has strictly charged us not to do, and at the same time robbing ourselves of the peace which otherwise we might enjoy, and greatly abridging our power of usefulness in the world. A truly blessed secret is learned when we discover that whatever God has given us to do or to bear, He does not want us to worry about it. It is in this way, you see, if, in addition to the work given us to do, or the trial given us to bear, we worry concerning it, we are labouring under a double burden: there is the burden of the work and there is the burden of worry, a load as heavy again as we need to carry; and while the Lord makes Himself responsible for all the

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needful grace for the burdens He gives us to carry, He does not promise a particle of grace for self-made crosses or for self-imposed burdens ; and so when a man has learned that he may, and that he ought to, cease from worry and to rest in the Lord, he finds that the strength of his life which has been given to worrying becomes so much force set free, and made available for other and higher ends. You can do so much more work for God, for the Church, for all about you in your home, and in the common walks of life, if you do not worry, and do it all without getting half so tired. The Lord would have His servants be "without carefulness," and so by their quietness and confidence show how fully and perfectly they trust Him and all His thoughtful love for them. How often a very anxious mother fails to be among those of her own household what she might be, because she always seems weighed down with her load of cares, and because.

instead of staying herself upon God, her heart, by reason of a thousand anxieties, has become like the little lake of Galilee, when the winds from the surrounding hills swept down upon it, and wrought it into a state of disturbance and unrest.

Is there a real salvation from these and all the other temptations which beset us in our own households? There is, if only we are willing to avail ourselves of what is unmistakably our privilege in Christ. If He could only save us in some ideal or almost perfect surroundings, it would not mean much, but He can save us under *all* circumstances. Suppose a woman to be desirous of glorifying Christ as her Master, in her home, with a natural tendency to fretfulness, with servants that give her trouble, with children that make large demands upon her patience, with a husband who perhaps does not sympathize much with all her higher aspirations and hopes, and does not share her faith, with an income so small that she has to deny

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many of her wishes and to exercise the very strictest economy at every point, and with more work than she has really strength to do, would she be justified in saying within herself, "I know that my Saviour has died for me, and has graciously and freely forgiven me all my sins, and I know also that He is able to come into the midst of my home, and my cares, and my trials, and my disappointments, and my circumstances, and so control them, and so control me, that I shall not be easily provoked, that I shall not lack sympathy for others, and shall not wear a shade of care upon my face, or lose the sense of God's stillness in my soul"? Can we doubt, in the face of all that Christ has promised to be, that she would be justified in so concluding? A wondrous feeling of peace comes into the heart when we take our hands off all attempts to shape things to our pattern, and to bring our circumstances into agreement with what we would like them to be,

and when we put the guiding and controlling of all into His wise and blessed hands, and accept as His will and His discipline for us that which in itself is trying to bear. Then we find how sweetly possible it is to have quiet within, even among outward distractions, victory, though strong the foe and fierce the fight, and our life is transformed from being a sigh, and it becomes a song.

We have then to settle, once for all, this in our mind—that the life which the Lord Jesus proposes we should live is not alone possible where all about us are friendly to Him, but where all may be more or less unfriendly. The caged lark is often heard to sing as sweet a melody amid the dust and roar of a great city's streets as it might sing if soaring free as air above the clover-scented fields. The white lily springs out of the brown earth, and grows up pure and stainless from the soil. We read of saints in Cæsar's household (Phil. iv. 22), who amid all the sin

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and wrong around them maintained unbroken their fidelity to Christ. We hear of some who, "even in Sardis" (Rev. iii. 4), kept their garments undefiled, and if in such a cold and chilly clime as that, the plant of grace could thrive, can there be anywhere such conditions as make the living of the blessed life impossible? Impossible it would be, if it depended upon our own power or wisdom. If our personal environment supplied the aliment upon which the life of God in the soul is to be maintained, there would be conditions where that life could no longer be lived. But our best life draws its nourishment from no such broken cisterns as that of our environment. Like the tree which keeps green through all the drought of summer because its roots underground strike out in all directions, and draw the moisture to it, so by prayer and by the appropriating power of faith the soul turns to the Fountain of Living Waters, and from thence it draws fulness of supply. In so

far as the soul is knit in living union with the Lord Jesus Christ will it be found possible under all conditions to live not the life of nature, or of self, but of Christ.

Do you know anything of the calm and quiet which descend into the heart through sometimes leaving the multitude, the questionings of the people, and the noise of life's busy scenes, and going up into the mountain alone with Jesus? There is many a day when almost from the beginning things seem to go wrong with us. Events occur for which we had made no calculations, and which disarrange all our plans. The post brings disturbing letters, and one thing after another arrives to perplex and disappoint us. Well, He knows all about it, and there may be more of His hand in it than we think. He saw from His mountain retreat the disciples toiling in rowing. He sees us. And before you get carried off your feet, as perhaps you have been in the past, it must be well to turn to Him who is so able to steady and

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to guide you, and you will find it much more possible to deal wisely with all the fresh complications the day has brought, after getting a quiet time with the Lord. What a sweet picture is that in the Gospel of the Lord Jesus going into the house where the woman lay sick of a fever, and taking her by the hand and lifting her up. There are many feverish hands. The pressure of life's burden often chafes the spirit; and when you feel that you are getting over-wrought, put out about things, are conscious of the first signs of impatience, and irritability, and unrest within, when you feel that you do not know what you shall do or say next, it is imperative that you should turn, even though you can do it but for a moment, to the dear Lord, that you may claim His keeping power, may experience His healing touch, and the calm will come back to you, and it will be with you as with the woman of old, of whom it is said that when "Jesus took her by the hand, the

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fever left her, and she arose, and ministered unto them." There is nothing that so qualifies us for true ministry as having the feverish unrest of the heart displaced by the coming to it of the Saviour's peace. They who rest in the Lord can best work for the Lord.

And it is this peace which garrisons the heart, and if it does indeed garrison *our* heart, and the Lord's presence there is a great reality, we shall find it more easy to bear life's limitations, to put up with the irritability or the harshness of those around us, to endure trials without fainting under them, to seek, even at the sacrifice of our own comfort, the good of those around us, and though we live in homes where there is little to help, and much to hinder, we shall only because of trial be cast more fully upon the Lord, and we shall find, by letting Him live out His life in us, and dying each day to self, that, like Him whom we follow, we shall be as "lilies among the thorns."



Cap 6

THE KING'S BUINESSS

WHEN the Holy Child Jesus met the rebuke of those who had sought Him sorrowing by asking, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" He voiced the feeling of many hearts. As He had come to earth, not to do His own will, not to please Himself, so is it true of all His disciples, that they "live not unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Cor. v. 15). Sh 2/29

The very first idea involved in that of a servant, and especially of a "bond-servant," is that he is not only the possession of another, but that he is under rule to that other, and that he is here to execute the

orders of that other. It is clear that from the moment of the call to discipleship the Lord contemplates having him for His servant ; and the first question, therefore, that the servant has to ask his Lord, as he goes in the quiet early morning hour, is "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do ? " And life can only reach its highest meaning for us, and enfold the fullest measure of blessedness, as it comes to be a yielding to the Lord, a doing of His bidding in everything. And there is nothing which can lend such a dignity to common toil, and to prosaic duties, and to the doing of things which bring no human recognition or praise, as to be able to feel, in all this I am doing what my Lord and King commandeth.

It is not indeed to be expected that when we place ourselves at the entire disposal of our heavenly Master, He will always give us to do what we should have chosen for ourselves. But faith makes no demur, asks no questions, raises no objections ; it

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accepts in trustful submission the Lord's will, and rises up and girds the loins to serve His bidding. It is not for the servants of the house to appoint the tasks and duties of the day, or the order in which they shall be done; it is for the Master of the house to say what each servant shall do, and only as his authority is recognised can those servants be happy in their service and the work go smoothly on.

And in Christian experience there are few things more true than what St. John says: "His commandments are not grievous" (1 John v. 3). They are never that, when our will is in union with His will. They may sometimes cut athwart our pride and our plans; but where the Spirit of the Lord has sway, the commandments of the Lord are never grievous. To some, indeed, it appears as if the Christian is a man under bondage; but the very last thing that ever occurs to one whose heart has been captured by the love of

Christ, in what he gives up for Christ's sake, or in what He does at His bidding, is, that he is under any kind of bondage. The Apostle Paul, indeed, frankly says, "The love of Christ *constraineth* us"; but the bondage of love is always tolerable and sweet. That is the only bondage which the Christian knows. To a youth who has broken away from parental restraint, and is living a life in which he recognises no law save that of his own passions and desires, it may appear that his brother, who stays at home, and obeys the laws of his father's house, and carries out the wishes of his father's mind and heart, is under bondage which must be grievous. But that obedient son would not say so; there is nothing for him hard or irksome in his father's commandments. And Christians who have submitted all their plans, and duties, and pursuits, and engagements, and even their very recreations, unreservedly, to the holy restraints and government of the Spirit of the Lord,

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do not find that they have by so doing diminished, but have actually increased their possibilities of real happiness. "There is no *fear* in love." It is only those who accept daily the Lord's ruling about things, who know how much joy there may be in little acts of self-denial for His sake ; only those who are under law to God, who know how possible it is to be under law to Him and yet be free—as free as a child in his father's house ; only those who have taken upon them the yoke of Christ, who know how easy that yoke is, how absolutely free it is from all that galls and chafes the spirit ; how easily it lies upon the shoulders by reason of its soft silken lining of love, and that it is only when we are under that yoke we can find rest unto our souls (St. Mark xi. 29, 30).

When the Lord puts any service into our hands for Him, He is doing us a great honour. To think that He has chosen *us* when He might have chosen others more wise, more eloquent of speech, more richly

furnished with mental gifts, more honourable in place and station ! “ Lord, who am I that Thou shouldest ask this of *me* ? ” But let us beware of the mistake of declining the service because we think we are unworthy or unfit. To do so would be to yield to the workings of our subtle, simple flesh. If we are not thinking of self at all, we shall not want to escape the urgency of the Lord’s “ Go ye ” by pleading that too much honour is put upon us. Humility is a rare and beautiful grace ; but it is not real humility which keeps us from the path of obedience. Good and great a man as Moses was, it is clear that self had not died in him, or when the Lord called him to arise and deliver Israel, he would not have sought to get rid of his responsibility, or have answered the Lord so persistently, “ O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since Thou hast spoken to Thy servant : but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue ” (Exod. iv. 10). Was it not self-conscious-

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ness rather than modesty that framed that answer? And if we did not think of self at all, of our worthiness or our unworthiness, or of our reputation in the eyes of men, we should rise up at God's call to go where He sends, sure of this, that He is the best judge of the suitableness or fitness of the instrument which He is pleased to take into His hand, and sure too that He will never call us to a work without making Himself chargeable for the provision of all needed grace.

Many have missed great opportunities, like Jonah did, because they have thought more of their reputation with men than of being simply obedient to the will of God. The apostles were willing "to be fools for Christ's sake" (1 Cor. iv. 10), so truly had they been crucified with Christ. And it is still one of the essential conditions of all true and fruitful service. The Lord Jesus affirmed a great law which holds good in all ages, when He said, "Except a grain of wheat fall into the

ground and die, it abideth alone ; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." Look at that grain of wheat, and think of all the possibilities that lie folded up within it. Who could think, did he not know it beforehand, that in that little thing lie hidden from sight "the blade, the ear, the full corn in the ear"—that in it there lies a harvest, which shall wave on the plain like a sea of gold stirred by the evening breeze, and which, when reaped and crushed and broken in the mills, shall be the bread which strengtheneth man's heart? It is all there in that grain of wheat. But how shall it realize its possibilities—become what it may become, do what it has the power of doing? Keep it in your hand, or leave it in the granary, "it abideth alone." The condition upon which it can alone realize its possibilities is that that grain of wheat shall be put into the ground and *die*. It must be nothing, before it can become anything. It must lose, before it can gain. It must

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die, before it can bring forth fruit. And if we are to serve the King in the best and highest way, to help on His coming kingdom, to exert a true and blessed influence among men, to make known in the world the savour of His name, we must die—die to our good self and to our sinful self, die to the world, and die to all our own plans, die to all schemes of happiness-making, and die to our reputation, and live only to God. There is no way into the harvest fields but through the gate of death. “If it *die*, it bringeth forth much fruit.”

But besides that, it is very important, in these busy times, that we who are called out upon the King's business should not live upon the interests, or the excitements, or the successes of our work, or overlook the fact that we can only keep ourselves fresh, and our work fresh by keeping ourselves in living touch with the Lord. There is great danger often of our suffering the claims of our work to overlap our

believing times, our praying times. There is a possibility, if we do not cultivate the listening ear, of outrunning the Lord's commands, of doing much for the sake of doing much—of doing more than He asks at our hands. There are many so busy that they have no time for anything but work. They go hither and thither. They are always under high pressure, and too often the result of this over-doing, this attempt to compass everything in other people's vineyards, is seen in the neglected condition of their own little vineyard, in a frequent tendency to irritability, and in a breakdown of the nervous system. Now the Lord is not a hard Master. He does not want one of His servants to work beyond his strength. He used to take his disciples apart, that they might rest awhile. And He is still the same gracious Master, considerate of our needs ; and while there are some whose slothfulness is a sorrow to Him, there are others to whom He is saying, "Be still a little. Do less.

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Do not try to accomplish everything." And if we have no other end in serving but simply to do His will, His Spirit will so guide our thought and judgment, that we shall be able to decide amid the many pressing and sometimes conflicting claims of the day, which of them is from Him. In the midst of His own busy life our Lord always found time for communion with His Father. And we must find it too, if our work is to retain the warmth and energy of life, and if we, as workers for Him, are to keep the spirit which alone makes us of highest use to Him. The mower does not find it lost time which he spends in stopping to whet his scythe ; the ploughman does not find it lost time when he stops to rest his horses, the fisherman does not find it lost time to stop and mend his nets, and after the broken nets are mended he is more likely to catch fish. And the servant of the Lord will not find that they are wasted hours which he spends waiting at His feet, but from that glorious

presence he will go back with a new power resting upon him, and his work for God, will throb as with the pulses of a new and more vigorous health.

And yet it would be very sad if ever we thought it enough to do the Lord's work in any other way than heartily and diligently. Slovenliness is never more out of place than in the service of the King. It is impossible to look at any of God's works and fail to see the signs which they display of what we may speak of as careful workmanship, even though the thing created is only an insect's wing, or a blade of grass, or the humblest flower that blows. * There is a finish in each trifling thing which shows the Master hand. And a desire to please Him will prompt ■ thoroughness, a single-mindedness, an endeavour to do our best in every service we undertake for Him. We shall not take the lame or the blind and offer that as a sacrifice unto the Lord, or that which costs us nothing (2 Sam. xxiv. 24).

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"Cursed be he," wrote the old prophet once, as if he were indignant at the way in which some around him took up God's service and did it,—*"cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently"* (Jer. xlviii. 10). It is always worth while to take infinite pains with anything God gives us to do. Careless half-hearted service, is not worthy of us, for whom He has done so much. The rose we gather for Him, let it be the finest and the most fragrant of all that blossom in our garden.

And the nearer we keep to Him the more likely is He to send us upon His errands and to use us about His work. Mary was the first messenger the risen Saviour sent to tell to others the tidings of His resurrection, and she got that honour because from the dawn of day she kept near the place where she knew the body of her Lord to be. It is wonderful how He uses some. They are not great, nor rich, nor clever ; the secret can only be that they are so fully yielded up

to Him, and always so close at hand, that they are always ready for His use. Oh, to be always thus close at hand ; then what more likely, if He has need of a messenger, than that He should send *us*. It is a comfortable thought amid all life's toils and cares that the Lord is always "at hand," closer than all circumstances, or friends, or temptations, and that we have only to speak, and He is present to aid. And it is not less blessed for us to be also at hand, ready for the Master's use, so that if He needs a sower to sow the seed, or a reaper to cut down the standing corn, or a husbandman to dress the vines, or one to gather in the fruit, or a soldier to fight His battles, or a herald to proclaim His word, here are we "at hand" for His use.

And the King's business is not one to be trifled with. "It demands haste" (1 Sam. xxi. 8). It is such that it cannot be put off, or postponed, or made to wait upon man's convenience or man's pleasure. It must be put first. Few things

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in the life of a child are more beautiful than quick, prompt, unquestioning, and unhesitating obedience to his father's will, and all such obedience is like a crown of glory upon the head of both parent and child. And it is that spirit we want to manifest in the Lord's House, in which we stand and wait as His servants. The King's command only looks uncertain when we delay obedience to it, and cast about to find some reason to escape doing it. But when obedience to God's will, becomes the ruling habit of the soul, then shall we find how wonderfully that spirit delivers us from all uncertainties, and how obedience is but another fountain of blessing.



Cap 7

STEWARDSHIP

THE disciple of the Lord may be viewed in various aspects, and indeed he is so viewed in the written Word. It takes many images to set forth what Christ is to His people, and, though in a lesser degree, it requires many images to set forth what Christ means His disciples to be to Him and for Him in the world. We always have to think of the disciple as one who has been redeemed, and redeemed by the precious blood of Christ. That fact must never be overlooked or forgotten.

But the disciple is not only redeemed, he is redeemed to serve. He belongs to Him who redeemed him. St. Paul

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never hesitates to speak of himself by a term which, used of any other service or any other connection, would be a humiliating admission, but used in respect to the Lord Jesus, is far otherwise,—he calls himself the “bondservant,” the slave, of Jesus Christ. Remote indeed from such service is the idea of drudgery or bondage. The true disciple never longs for freedom from the law or the control of Christ. He is content and thankful to be in His service; and if in the day when he first chose it, He chose it with readiness of mind, he has felt often since, as he has proved the love and grace and faithfulness of his Lord, that if he had to choose over again, he would repeat the choice of former years, only with a thousand times more eagerness and joy. Men must be in His service to know what happiness it yields.

But the disciple is not only a servant, he is a witness for His Lord. Those that experienced the Saviour’s healing touch during the days of His earthly life became

witnesses of His grace and power ; and every saved man is a witness. Can the Lord forgive sin ? Can He, amid all outward distraction, keep the soul in perfect peace ? Can He, apart from circumstances, satisfy the soul ? Can He sustain in weakness and in trial ? Can He so rule the forces of our nature that each power thereof shall be kept in its right place and to its right work ? Can He stay and quiet us when outward troubles, like raging billows, surge around us, and amid the averted faces of our friends and the reproaches of our foes ? To this there are two witnesses—the Written Word, and the living disciple. “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you.”

And the disciple is also a steward. The Christian state is one in which we, and all we have, have gone over to Christ. It is indeed well to remember that the moment we came by faith to possess Christ we came into the possession of all things in Him (2 Cor. vi 10). There is no sepa-

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rating Christ from His gifts. We can only receive His gifts by receiving Jesus Himself, just as we can only have the fragrance by having the flower that yields it. And having Him we have all things in Him. But let us not forget the other side of this blessed truth. If the giving of ourselves to the Lord Jesus means anything, it means that we have ceased to have any ownership in ourselves. "Not your own" is true of our time, our strength, our knowledge, our money, our influence, our all; we are simply the Lord's stewards, the trustees of property which we are to use for Him. To stewardship attaches responsibility. He entrusts us with the knowledge of His will, that we may impart it to others; with light, that we may let it shine; with influence, that we may use it for the help of others; with gifts, that we may spend them in His service; and with money, that we may hold it as a trust from Him. "It is required of a steward that a man be found faithful"

(1 Cor. iv. 2). What is it to be unfaithful? Is it not for the servant to take and use about himself, for his own gain, or pleasure, that which is his Lord's? Would it not change many of our lives if we paused a moment to reflect, It is my Lord's time I propose to spend about this folly, or my Lord's money that I propose to spend over this personal self-indulgence; and what shall I say to Him when He and I—all separating veils rent asunder—stand face to face, and He asks for what is His own?

It is not for any man to lay down rules with respect to Christian giving for one besides himself. What ought to be given to the treasury of the Lord must depend upon many considerations, which widely differ in different cases, only this holds good in all, that when a man is in happy fellowship with his Lord, realizing His love in the soul, it will be shown him what he ought to do, and give, and the giving will be no grudging or burdensome

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task, but a freewill offering of love, like the act of the woman at Bethany, when she broke her box of costly ointment, and with the precious nard anointed the feet of her Lord. To part with money for the service of God in the world is, with some Christians, a very painful task. They plead that they cannot afford to do it, and, in so pleading, they only say what is quite true. But how is it that they cannot afford it? Is it not that in conforming to the fashions of the world they have, step by step, in some cases almost unconsciously, got into such an extravagant and luxurious way of living that it absorbs all their income, and they cannot afford to give? It is sadly true that many who profess faith in the Lord Jesus spend large sums of money in luxurious dress and living, in the cultivation of exotics, in providing costly entertainments for their rich neighbours, who yet plead their inability to give to the cause of God in the world, or to the work of sending the gos-

pel to the heathen, or to the rescue of the perishing around them. But they are stewards for all that, and it is *required* in a steward that a man be found faithful.

L Of Sir Thomas Sutton it is said that his constant prayer, which he was often heard to repeat as he walked up and down his garden, was, "Lord, Thou hast given me a large and liberal estate, give me also a heart to make the right use of it." And the prayer was heard, and the heart to use aright his wealth was given, as the existence of the Charterhouse to this day declares.] And if all Christians had the disposition, the sense of responsibility, for which Sir Thomas Sutton prayed, if we all held our possessions as a trust from God, if we realized that all we have comes from Him, and that we owe Him all, Christian giving would be a different thing from what it sometimes is. The disciples and the Master of old had but one purse. What He had, He gladly shared with them ; and what they had, they

gladly shared with Him. It is blessed to feel that His interests and ours, our interests and His, are identical—that He makes over to us all His unsearchable riches, and bids us take as we have need, and that we make over, by consecration, to Him all that we possess. And, in this sacred partnership, it is good to live from day to day ; and, when the long shadows fall and the evening bell calls us home, in this sacred partnership it will be good to die.



Cap 8

*GOD'S
GUIDING HAND*

THE believer bears a casket, the gift of his Lord to him, and this casket is full of very precious jewels. Among them is the promise of guidance, and it is a matter of great joy to remember that we are not left to pick our way across a pathless desert, or to cut our road through a thick forest, but that the Lord Himself goes before us to lead and keep us,—that Divine leading is not a less real thing to-day than it was in those times which lie so far back in the history of the Chosen people, when the Lord led them through the wilderness, by going before them as a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night (Exod. xiii. 21, 22) ; and it is

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very restful for us to be able to-day to put our hand, hot and trembling as it often is, into His hand, and to be as a little child with no will of our own, save that we will to do His will.

But while it is comparatively easy to believe that God is willing to concern Himself with the most serious and weighty matters of our life, it is often difficult, when we think of God's glory and greatness, to believe that He should care to have anything to do with the multitude of trifles which, though trifles, mean so much to us. Can it be? David, in one of his psalms, speaks of the steps of a good man as being ordered by the Lord (Ps. xxxvii. 23). The steps? Not only that the general plan and purpose of a good man's life are ordered and supervised by God, but that the very steps involved in the development and working out of that general purpose and plan are deemed important enough to be "ordered of the Lord." So that the guidance of God is not a truth

for the great emergencies of life merely. Our life is not made up of great emergencies: they come sometimes, and it is reassuring to know that we have promises which cover them. But life for most of us is made up of endless little details, trifles, and difficulties so minute that we do not care to talk of them to others, and it is to these very things that the guiding hand of God extends.

And that it is so need create no surprise. In making the world, God has shown as much care about the details of creation as about the general plan. The meanest flower that grows under the hedge, the insect whose life is measured by but a few brief hours, the snowflake falling from the cloud simply to melt, show as much the wisdom and power of the Creator and of the adaptation of means to ends, as do all the greater things which His hand has fashioned. And if God—to speak after the manner of men—could bestow such pains on the very

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smallest things He has made, there is surely no need to wonder that He does not regard as beneath Him the guidance of His servants in reference to the very smallest concerns of their life. He orders our steps, and of all this, Christian experience is ample witness.

But if we are to know the reality of God's guiding hand, there must be, on our part, a willingness to be guided. Many profess to be seeking guidance of the Lord when what they really want is to get the Lord's consent for them to take a way of their own choosing. How many of our prayers are but an endeavour to urge our will on God, rather than a cry to have our minds and hearts brought into a joyful acceptance of His will? Is not that just as if a traveller among the mountains should seek the services of a trusted Alpine guide and should then propose to change places with the guide—the one who knows *not* the way over the mountains to guide, and the one who knows the way

to follow? Were it not better to follow the guide who knows the way, and to put our feet in the track that he, going before us, makes for us? And it settles a great many perplexities when we see that we are here simply to do God's will, that that is the one great purpose of life, and that all other things are secondary and subordinate to that. It wonderfully simplifies everything when a man has got no other purpose than that. It brings rest and calm to the soul when we can say, "I am here simply and for no other purpose than to do what God gives me to do." It is when we want to do our own will that we get perplexed and confused about the right road. But to say, "I am not here to please myself; I am not here to do what my fellow men think I ought; I am not here to be happy; I am not here even to do what is called Christian work; I am here simply to do God's will," is to be in a position of seeing clearly, and of becoming free from much of the uncertainty

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which many feel about the way wherein they should go.

It sometimes happens that the right path is clear enough, only we lack the necessary faith and courage to take it. Many questions may be answered in a moment by bringing reason or conscience into play, or by asking, What saith the Scripture? or by a consideration of what is becoming in one who is under law to Christ; and it is nothing else than solemn trifling to stand, in such a case, praying or asking, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" To ask some questions is to answer them; and to hesitate to act, when God has clearly revealed His will, is to trifle with Him and with ourselves. It is not more light that many Christians want; it is more faith and more courage, and more of the spirit of obedience to walk in the light which is given us; and they would be better occupied in imploring God to work in them the grace of obedience to His will, than in asking for more light.

There are sure to be trials of faith. We may be kept awaiting an answer for what, as we view it, seems a long time. In the meantime let us not move a step. "I waited patiently for the Lord" (Ps. xl. 1), says the royal Psalmist. It is this waiting that sometimes is so trying. The temptation is sure to come to take matters into our own hand; to force a passage through surrounding obstacles; to go, as Jacob did, before God. But the Lord is never behind time. He never forgets a promise, and no one ever waited for Him, and refused to take a step forward till He gave the word, without feeling that it was well to have waited.

For has He not said, "I will guide thee with Mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8)? He will never go back from His word, and faith will stay itself upon the character of God, which is behind every promise, and quietly wait for God to do His own work in His own way. But there is no one so sure of hearing the voice of the heavenly Guide

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as the man who is walking near to Him. To many He has to say, "Come ye near unto Me." God does not speak in thunder His words or counsel, but in a still, small voice ; and He can be only heard by those that are walking very close to Him. "Come near." You are perhaps far away from Him, deep in the friendships of the world, and God's voice seldom seems to fall upon your ear. The sheep that are closest to the shepherd are the likeliest to hear all the shepherd says. Oh, thus to be as sheep that follow close by the shepherd, and we too shall hear Him say at every parting of the road, "This is the way."

And though the pathway of the Divine will may look full of difficulty and danger, yet it is one of the surprises of Christian experience that as the Lord goes before us He clears a way for us where at the time we could see no way, and through a land that looked shut up. With troubled hearts the women wended their way to

the sepulchre in the grey dawn of the third day after their Lord was crucified, asking, as weak women well might ask, "Who shall roll us away the stone from the door of the sepulchre?" But they did not let the fear of any difficulty deter them from their errand of love; and they went on, and lo! when they came to the garden grave, it was to find that unseen hands had been at work in the night, and had rolled the stone away. And so, when in unquestioning faith we trust ourselves to the guiding of our Lord, He goes before, and step by step removes difficulty and danger from the path, or opens for us a safe passage through them. The marginal reading of the promise above is expressive—"I will counsel thee, Mine eye shall be upon thee." It is as if He said, "I will keep Mine eye upon you, if you are only willing and obedient, so as to stop you from taking a wrong turn or a false step in the road. Mine eye shall be upon you when tried or tempted or per-

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plexed, when the path takes you down into deep, dark valleys, or up long, steep hills, or across the burning desert, through the King's country, or through the encampments of the foe. Mine eye shall be upon you always. You may not be able always to be thinking of Me, but I shall be always thinking of you ; and when I am wanted, I shall be there." Oh, the care the Lord has for His own, and the interest He has in His beloved, is past telling. "The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by Him ; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between His shoulders" (Deut. xxxiii. 12). Art *thou* of the number of the beloved of the Lord ?



Cap 9

UNDER THE CLOUD OR THE DISCIPLINE OF SORROW

A MAN may be a true follower of the Lord Jesus and a doer of the will of God, and yet have a large acquaintance with human sorrow and trial. The disciples were forewarned of this when the Saviour told them, "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (St. John xvi. 33). He never pictured for His followers, passing over the earth on their pilgrim way, a flower-besprinkled path. He told them plainly what they might expect. It does not enter into the Divine purpose to exempt the children of the kingdom from the action of trial upon them. So, faithful and uncompromising a preacher of righte-

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ousness as was John the Baptist, we read of him being cast into prison. So, much as Peter loved his Lord, we read of the fever in his house prostrating his wife's mother. So, tender and true as was the relationship between the Lord Jesus and the Bethany family, we read of death entering, with its cold shadow, that home. And so of the apostle Paul we read, devoted as he was to the work of the gospel, that he was often going through the fire. To follow Christ, then, does not mean exemption from the sorrows of life.

Now the heart is very liable to become anxious and troubled when the clouds come up darkening the sky. In the hour of loss, or in the hour of pain, or in the hour of bereavement, Satan is sure to make the most of his opportunity to inject doubts into the mind concerning the love of God. "If God loved you, would He have let this thing happen to you? Would He have thus dashed the cup of human happiness from your lip?

Would He had taken from you what you most wanted to keep? Would not a mother do her utmost to keep trouble from her child? Can God love you to have done this thing?" The only attitude to take is that of faith. Perfect trust in Him, in a moment, answers all such questions, and silences all such doubts. Our loving Father is concerned not merely with our present and momentary happiness. His plans and purposes stretch through eternity, and He is ever working towards some far-off and blessed end. The vine can only be brought to full fruitfulness by constant and vigorous pruning. The clay, newly taken from the pit, can only be fashioned into a vessel fit to stand in royal halls by being put upon the potter's wheel, and from thence passed through the fire. The rude, shapeless block of marble cut from the quarry can only be transformed into a fair statue by successive strokes of the sculptor's chisel, and so we may well believe that

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pain and sorrow and disappointment are but so many processes through which God has to put those whom he needs for His service, that they may be meet for His use. Still sorrow remains sorrow, and pain remains pain.

But while there are some happenings in our life which are plainly the Lord's doing, there are things continually occurring in which it is very difficult to trace His hand, in which we seem the rather to see the human hand, and we are ready to say, "An enemy hath done this." And these are the trials which are hardest to bear. If a loss, or if a sorrow, or if a disappointment, come upon us directly from the hand of God, if we could be sure of that, it would, we think, be so easy to bear it; but when it is so clearly the work of another hand than His, we feel deprived of the comfort which we should have if we knew it was the *Lord's* doing, and we feel, "I cannot submit to this as to the will of God, for this a matter surely with which

the will of God has nothing to do." In one sense it is so. But is there not another sense, and a very true one, in which we may look upon even such trials as spring from the unfaithfulness, and the untruth, and the unkindness of others, as the will of God for us? Supposing it to have been His will to have done so, could he not have interposed, and by the stretching out of His arm have prevented the things over which we grieve from happening? And the very fact that He did not so interpose, that He suffered this and that thing to happen, is at least an indication that this is His will for us, that we may so regard it, and quietly acquiesce in it. There may be some lesson which can only be learnt, some truth which can only be brought home to us, some fitness for service which can only be gained by our going through this experience, and when under the cloud, no matter that it looks an earth-born cloud, the right attitude for us to take is that of humbling ourselves

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under the mighty hand of God, and praying that we may not miss the blessing of a sanctified trouble, or be too dull of heart to learn its lesson.

And more often than it is possible to say, it is through the discipline of sorrow that the best things in life seem to come to us, and that we find out all that God can be and do for the soul that seeks the shelter of His wings. Many would never have known how tender and gracious is Divine sympathy, if circumstances had not risen in their life to make them need it. Many would never have known how sweet are the comfortings of God, if the wild storms without had not driven them to seek the refuge of His love. And many would never have known how gentle and strong are the everlasting arms, and how good it is to lie back in them and rest there, if it had not been for the breaking down of all their earthly props. It is good to be shut up to God, and that which throws us wholly upon Him, though it may wear a

UNDER THE CLOUD OR

strange disguise, is an "angel unawares." And thus earthly sorrow and trial are often but the dark background in the front of which shine, like lights against a frowning sky, with more conspicuous brightness, the love, the grace, the sympathy, the tenderness of Him who comforts as a mother comforts her child.

There is no reason, therefore, for any Christian hearts to torment themselves with the fear that because there is trial in their life, they are not the children of God. In the very darkest day it is always best to take up the song of faith and sing it, "I will trust, and not be afraid." The Lord has put you where you may test His love and faithfulness, and who can so well bear witness for Him, in an unbelieving world, as those who have tried and proved Him?

The Lord Himself sits over the fire in which His servants, as silver and gold, are being tried, and He will not keep them in the fire a moment longer than is

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needful for the accomplishment in them of the purposes of His grace. One would shrink from the fire if it were controlled by any other hand than His, one would dread the knife if it were in any other hands but the hands of Infinite Love. The fire will not indeed be anything else than fire, and the knife will not be anything else than the knife, though it is where it is ; but we know that the fire in His hands will not be allowed to hurt, but only used to refine away the dross, and make us the more able to reflect His beauty, and that the knife will not be used to injure or destroy, but only to cut away from the vine all that is hindering not merely its gracefulness, but its fruitfulness. Every life, sometime or other, gets to have its Gethsemane in it ; but Jesus has not only been there, and wept and prayed and suffered there before us, but He is there still, "able to succour."

And we are in heaviness only for a season. The weeping endures for a night,

for "joy cometh"—surely cometh to stay—"in the morning" (Ps. xxx. 5). And we must not forget the promise which assures us of the Divine presence in passing "through the waters," and "through the rivers," and "through the fire" (Isa. xliii. 2). It is only a "passing through." It is not a stopping place. You are like a traveller coming to a town on his journey which offers him poor, inhospitable entertainment. But he knows he is only there for the night, and in the morning he will be moving on. So you are "passing through." To-night you are camping in the desert; but then, to-morrow you may be at Elim under the palm trees. For it is God's delight, when He can consistently with His purpose in them, to lead His people through green pastures (Jer. xxxi. 12-14). But the rough road over the hill may be as needful for us as the way through the sweet, quiet meadows, and the nearest way to where God would have us be; and whether it is the one or

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the other, our only safe attitude is that of trust, and of close abiding by Him, in whose hands we have put all the interests of our life, and under whose gracious escort we are "passing through," always taking care to obey His voice, and to provoke Him not, that He may indeed be an enemy to our enemies, and an adversary to our adversaries, and bring us into the good land which He has promised (Exod. xxiii. 20-23).

"I would rather walk in the dark with God
Than walk alone in the light :
I would rather walk with Him by faith
Than walk alone by sight."



Cap 10 *THE SOUND OF THE MASTER'S FEET*

BEFORE our blessed Lord left the earth He distinctly promised His disciples that He would come again ; and in Gospel and Epistle the prospect of the Lord's return is set forth as the Church's greatest hope, and its strongest motive to diligence and fidelity. And now, after long years of waiting, it looks sometimes as if there were signs which encourage the expectation that the coming of the Lord indeed draweth nigh ; it may be indeed possible to misread these signs, or to draw unwarrantable inferences from them, and we must not forget our Lord's own warning word that He will come suddenly, and

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that the day and the hour no man knoweth (St. Matt. xxiv. 44). Still, just as when the birds begin to wake the woodlands with their songs we know that morning is at hand, and as when the flowers appear on the earth, and we breathe the lilac-perfumed air, we know that summer is nigh, so it seems reasonable, as we read some of the things happening in our time, in the light of New Testament teaching, to regard them as signs of the nearing end of the age, and the dawn of that day, which for all true believers is the day of days, when, according to His promise "the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God" (1 Thess. iv. 16). Blessed are those who feel their hearts move with the excitement of a holy joy at the prospect, and who daily cry, "Amen; even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. xxii. 20).

The return of the Lord from heaven is a fact that ought, by all that serve Him,

to be kept steadily and constantly in view. To do so will be to put a powerful check upon all tendencies to slothfulness and worldliness. A servant who has no expectation of a possible speedy return of his lord, but who thinks on the contrary that it will be long before he comes, may be tempted to become self-seeking and self-indulgent ; but if he is expecting him, and expecting him any day, he will naturally want to have everything in readiness for his master's eye. And the more fully we realize the meaning of our Lord's word, "Surely I come quickly," the more likely we are to be diligent in our appointed service—to hold loosely by all things of the world, and the less likely to fret under human disappointment and care.

Nor less true is it that to be "looking for this blessed hope" is to promote growth in purity of heart. And so St. John says : "Every one that hath this set on him purifieth himself, even as He is pure" (1 John iii. 3, R.V.). The disciple

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lives indeed daily in the presence of the Lord; every day he opens his heart to the searching light of that eye from which no secret is hidden; and just as the sun in summer gilds not only the mountain tops, but penetrates into the remotest corners of the valley, so he knows that there is nothing in him that is veiled from His all-seeing eye; and the thought of this would be intolerable, did he not know what a loving and gracious Lord ours is, and that His motive in searching us is not to find ground for blame, but that the evil thing which troubles us, and prevents Him from having the pleasure in us that He fain would have, may be tracked to its stronghold, and overcome, and put away from us. And yet, though this is so, no one can help feeling that it will be a very solemn thing to see the Master, no longer "through a glass, darkly, but face to face." And it is impossible to have this hope—for a hope it is—and not a fear, of seeing Jesus, and of being

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made like Him, without denying with the full force of our will the right to any evil thing to remain in us, because we are the temple of the living God; or without claiming by faith and prayer for ourselves that full deliverance which is promised us in the power and presence of the Holy Ghost.

And the right attitude in which to await this great and glorious event when the Lord Himself shall come, is to be looking for it (Titus ii. 13), to be diligent in our service (2 Pet. iii. 14), to be ready to do all that will tend to hasten the coming of His feet (2 Pet. iii. 12, margin), to live a life of holy separation from the world, to watch (St. Luke xxi. 34) and to abide in Him (1 John ii. 28). "And now, little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before Him at His coming."

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